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ABSTRACT

This study explores how two years of teaching affected the motivation of graduates of the teacher preparation program at Jersey City State College who had been teaching in urban schools. These 21 teachers (12 elementary, 9 secondary, 7 early childhood) had taken part in an earlier study which examined their career motivations during student teaching. Analysis of the current data revealed that four of the teachers had increased motivation for teaching in urban schools and for teaching in general, 13 had the same motivation, and 4 indicated decreased motivation. Teachers with increased motivation cited: their commitment to and enjoyment in working with young people; a chance to make a difference by successfully meeting the needs of students in a difficult environment; and knowledge of what to expect in urban schools because of practicum experiences or the experience of growing up in an urban environment. For subjects with decreased motivation, two indicated students' lack of motivation and disrespect for teachers and learning, and two cited lack of institutional support. Challenges to maintaining motivation for all participants included difficult school environment, the lack of full-time employment opportunities, lower wages than other professions, the conditions for substitute teachers, and the tight job market. (ND)

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How teaching in the urban setting affects career motivations of beginning teachers: A longitudinal study

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This qualitative study explores how two years of teaching has affected the motivation of teachers who graduated from the teacher preparation program at Jersey City State College and have been teaching in urban schools. These teachers were all part of an earlier study which examined their career motivations during student teaching (Pagano, Weiner, Obi & Swearingen, 1995). At that point in the study, they had experienced strengthened confidence and commitment to teach in public schools with a culturally diverse student body. This study builds on those findings to explore how two to three years of teaching has affected this cohort's motivation to continue teaching.

ED 411 232

Perspectives:

Much research supports a focus on the second year of teaching, as distinct from preservice teaching and the first year. In her review of the research about professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers, Kagan (1992) notes that the early stages of classroom practice are spent acquiring procedural knowledge and redefining the image of self as teacher. Featherstone (1992) also describes how first-year teachers struggle to define themselves as teachers and create classroom that complement their self-definition. Only in the second year can they stand away from themselves and examine their classrooms and students more objectively and reflectively.

Research on teaching generally falls into two separate categories, one segment generated about teacher preparation, the other about teaching in the school setting. Rarely have programs of teacher education undertaken longitudinal studies that trace the career trajectory of their graduates and experiences in the school setting. The absence of data about how teacher preparation affects teachers' attitudes and classroom behavior in teaching a culturally diverse student body (Zeichner, 1993) is an especially important problem teacher education programs can address in research such as this.

Method:

Subjects. 38 people who graduated as teacher candidates (18 elementary, 9 secondary, 11 early childhood) from a northeastern state college whose motivations were studied earlier while they were student teaching (Pagano, et al, 1995) were the initial pool of subjects. This state college has a focus on reflective practice in urban education throughout the professional education course sequence. From this original group, 21 were included in this follow-up study.

Procedures. A letter explaining the study and a questionnaire were sent to all in the

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cohort to determine who is teaching, where they are teaching, and when they began teaching. 21 questionnaires were returned.

To increase the depth and richness of the data, a group interview was scheduled to determine if the subjects' motivations for choosing teaching as a career have changed in the past two years. Possibly because of the stormy winter day, only 6 students attended. This group interview was video- and audio taped, and transcribed. Because of the low attendance, the remaining subjects were contacted for an audio taped telephone interview. These interviews were carried out by a researcher not familiar to the students to eliminate the presence of the researchers who were acquainted with the cohort while they were students. This aspect of the design is intended to address one of the weaknesses of self-reported studies on the effects of teacher preparation programs on teachers' attitudes about cultural diversity (Zeichner, 1992). Eight people from the original group have not been located. Two people did not want to participate in the interview. Eleven telephone interviews were completed during the spring and summer of 1996 for a total of 17 subjects. Questions asked during both the group interview and telephone interviews were:

1. What have been your professional teaching experiences to date?
2. What is the ethnic, racial, and socio-economic status of the children you teach?
3. How have your teaching experiences so far affected your motivation to teach?
4. How have they affected your motivation to teach in an urban setting?
5. How have the students, the school environment, and the cultural diversity affected your motivation?

The 17 interviews were transcribed and serve as data along with the 21 questionnaires. The interview data is extremely consistent with the questionnaires and served as a way of ensuring a higher degree of reliability. The data reported here will be limited to that from the questionnaires since some of the same subjects answered both the questionnaire and interview.

The questionnaires were coded and analyzed following the procedure used in the previous study, comparing the themes that emerged to those in the earlier study by focusing on aspects of teaching in the urban environment that both encouraged and discouraged the teachers' motivations.

Results

The following chart shows the professional experiences the subjects undertook since graduation and the type of school settings:

Category:	Questionnaire
Teaching Own Class Now	
Yes	18
No	3
Teaching in Past Two Years	
Substitute	4
Own Class	17
Type of School	
Urban	16
Rural	2
Suburb	1
Parochial	5
Public	16
Grades Taught	
N-3	7
4-6	7
7-8	5
9-12	9

The majority of respondents felt that their motivation for teaching in urban schools and for teaching in general has increased or remained the same:

Increased Motivation	4
Same Motivation	13
Decreased Motivation	4

Only one subject responded that motivation to teach had been maintained but not in an urban environment. Two subjects responded that their motivation to teach specifically in an urban school had increased.

Increased Motivation. Looking at the responses of those teachers whose motivation stayed the same or increased, we found consistently that they mentioned their commitment to young people and enjoyment in working with young people. There was no indication that these teachers saw urban youth as deficient, but rather a product of a difficult environment. For example, they responded: "Kids are kids," "It's when one child learns that makes it worth all of the effort." The theme that has emerged most strongly was that although the teaching was very difficult, successfully meeting the needs of the students maintained the teachers' motivation. As one teacher put it:

"Education in the inner city is much more stressful than I had ever imagined. Class sizes are large...there are no aides...and there is not enough time to prepare. Luckily I still have a great love to work with the children and they remain my greatest source of motivation."

Other aspects of the students' role in keeping motivation high were the teacher's chance to make a difference, the opportunity to give something back, and to feel needed themselves. Eleven of the teachers are currently continuing their education, either in a Masters or English as a Second Language program to improve their ability to help students. These ideas can be seen in the following excerpts:

"I enjoy teaching in an inner city, very much so. I feel needed, I feel welcomed, I enjoy it very much. I have no desire to go to suburbia."

"My primary motivation was to work with young people to be able to give something to the next generation."

A second theme that has emerged is that their motivation has stayed high because they knew what to expect from having practicum experiences in urban schools and/or having grown up in an urban environment:

"I think I knew pretty much what to expect. And I haven't had any experiences any place else to compare urban children versus children that live in a suburban area. So I only have a one-sided view. I simply look upon all students as just simply being students."

Decreased Motivation. For those subjects who had a decreased motivation to teach, two cited the "kids" specifically as problematic. They said the students "have no respect" or "didn't want to learn." As one teacher whose motivation had decreased put it:

"I see their miseducation and their lack of motivation for school and disrespect for teachers and a disregard for their future."

For the other two respondents, motivation decreased because of lack of institutional support:

"I knew teaching was going to be difficult, but after a only one year of full-time teaching I wanted out. I just wanted to work with the kids as a teacher. I became very disillusioned about this profession mainly due to the fact that I felt I had no support (even with a mentor) and that I had many problems with getting everything done such as lesson plans, paper work, correcting papers, etc."

Challenges to Motivation. Even the teachers who reported that their motivation had remained constant or increased also mentioned the difficulties in maintaining their motivation. Five of these teachers, plus two whose motivation decreased mentioned the school environment as a theme of discouragement. Some of the teachers spoke of the difficulty of persevering:

"I would say that I still have the same motivation and desire but I never saw so many obstacles, so many challenges along the way."

"My biggest disappointment has been the lack of respect administrators have in the opinions of classroom teachers regarding policy, curriculum, discipline, and personnel. I have a combined 2-3 bilingual classroom with over 30 children and only an aide one period a day. We don't have enough space and we need more funding."

"There has been one area that has depleted my motivation since student teaching and that has been support from administration. Principals and school administrators look to you to perform an outstanding job while offering no support, funds, or prep time in which to do so."

Another aspect which decreased or challenged motivation was the lack of full-time employment opportunities. Some teachers mentioned the lower wages in the teaching profession in comparison to other fields, the condition of substitute teaching and the tight job market:

"I still have a strong desire to teach; however, because of the lack of teaching position available, I've become a little discouraged. As I am self-supporting, it was difficult to rely on a substitute salary as my sole support. I have considered committing personal 'financial suicide' as a substitute because I feel a very strong desire to teach."

Conclusions

The themes that this group mentioned two years earlier, during their student teaching, were repeated in these interviews. As student teachers, this cohort's motivation was for the success they had with the students. They felt that "kids were kids" and that urban kids needed them. Their motivation was lessened as student teachers by administrative issues and lack of materials. The results of the present study show that their teaching experiences have continued to instill in them a strong commitment to continue in their career and specifically to continue in urban public schools. The main focus of their motivation continues to be that of meeting the needs of the children and feeling like they are making a difference in a real, concrete way. Similar to the first study, comments from teachers whose motivation had

dropped indicated that the urban school environment, including the administration and support materials, prevented them from meeting the children's needs and therefore feeling that satisfaction.

A new finding in this study was the negative effect on motivation from the lack of job opportunities. Entry into the teaching profession through substituting appears to be a difficult route in maintaining motivation to teach. As a result of few job openings, some teachers were not teaching the age range of students they preferred which was also seen as a challenge to their motivation.

While data from this study does not necessarily represent what happens to graduates from all schools, it does begin to give us insight into the variables that affect motivation to teach in urban schools. We are currently analyzing data from teachers in their second year of teaching from other colleges and universities to make a comparison with this group.

By knowing what attracts teachers to this career, and what supports and maintains that motivation, we will help bridge the gap between preservice teacher preparation and beginning teaching experiences. These results also show the necessity of coordination between preservice teacher preparation programs and supervisory and administration programs in higher education. The finding that lack of administrative support was a strong factor in decreased motivation needs to be addressed. This information is vital for preparing educators to meet the challenges of teaching in urban settings.

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